

Ashes - Ribbon by [metal_jenny_blog](#)

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Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Sara Hopper

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper & Sara Hopper

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Summary:

Companion piece to Ashes. The drive to New York City.

Ashes - Ribbon

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Suggestions welcome.

The road unfurled in front of him, like a black ribbon.

Hopper visualised it snaking through the air vent of the truck, into his mouth, and down into his chest, where it wrapped itself around his heart. It squeezed and pulled at him, leading him away from his present and into the gnarled, choking weeds of his past.

He fiddled with the tuning knob on the radio as the music was overtaken by foamy static, the signal reaching the end of its range. The audio whined and sputtered before picking up some Johnny Cash. He rested his hand back on his knee and let his mind drift again.

The ribbon had started pulling at him long before yesterday, when he had driven out of the driveway. El and Joyce stood side by side, El's visage cracked and grey, unaired thoughts floating in her eyes; Joyce swallowing hard and worrying the skin around her left thumbnail with her teeth. He'd made life difficult for them in the last week. He'd stalked around the house with a permanent scowl twisting his features. His skin felt paper-thin and the slightest touch irritated him, like the poisonous hairs on a caterpillar. His eyes were flinty and sharp, and when he looked at El, he could feel the shard of his stare pierce her, pouring into her an icy cold that threatened to turn her into a statue.

Eventually, it was Jonathan who'd confronted him. Quietly, with authority, he told Hopper to figure out what it was that was drawing him away from the family, and confront it. Hopper thought of the black hole. He was sucking them all down. He visualised time slowing down, the force of it tearing apart the people he loved. When

he tried to close his eyes, all he saw was their accusing stares and grim mouths.

you did this to us

When he'd become a father the first time, he was ready. He and Diane had talked about it, they'd made sure he could support the family because Diane was anxious to be at home with the baby. They'd even been lucky enough to go to a hospital that allowed him in the birthing room. When Sara emerged, her skin marbled white and her face a squall of indignation, he thought his heart would burst with joy. Later, as his wife slept, he stood at the window to the nursery, his eyes never leaving her face. She had the sweetest rosebud mouth and her head was covered with a downy blonde cap of hair. He was content – he'd secretly hoped for a daughter, and a life surrounded by beautiful women seemed fine with him.

The radio played Elvis Presley. He thought of El. She had recently discovered him. Before, she'd turned her nose up at Hopper's music, preferring the bland, bubble-gum pop that Nancy favoured. She'd watched Love Me Tender one rainy afternoon and had been entranced. Hopper had dug out a couple of Elvis LPs and an old copy of Cool and Hep Cats magazine with Elvis on the cover. They sat around listening to the music and she flipped the pages of the magazine and asked questions. Hopper and Diane had seen him in New York – a rare night out while Sara was watched by the Ukrainian woman that lived downstairs from them. He'd had to break it to her that Elvis was dead, and he face fell. For weeks afterwards, she played the LPs over and over and thumbed the yellowed magazine, a sadly wistful look on her face.

Hopper realised that moments like these was what he missed the most about Sara. When you won over someone who might have labelled you 'uncool'. Sarah had been too young for that when she'd died. El had grown so much in the 12 months since they'd come out of hiding in the small cabin to live a more open life with Joyce and the boys. She'd picked up mannerisms and been influenced by the boys and Nancy and began developing her own style. No longer reliant on Hopper as her sole means of entertainment, she'd needed him less. It was a new experience, and it was then that he realised that it was new because he'd never had that moment with Sara.

It was then, he supposed, that the black hole had started to form. He was missing Sara less and less, even more that before El came along. When she died, the pain was like a blade repeatedly opening him up, over and over again. Over time, the blade had dulled. It took more to open the wound. And as he settled into a life of normalcy with Joyce, he began to not feel the blade anymore. Suddenly, her face and her voice became harder to recall. Memories that he felt certain would be burned indelibly on his soul became fuzzier around the edges. His life was filled with watching El blossom, of he and Joyce rediscovering their love. He was happy.

The guilt became like a gnawing pain in his heart. For the first time, he felt a need to visit Sara, to tell her about El and, to ask forgiveness for having stayed away so long.

The road continued to undulate in front of him, hypnotic, pulling him towards the city.

It was grey and cool, with a low hanging shelf of clouds. Hopper checked the scrap of paper in his hand with the coordinates and identifying marker number written on it. There were a lot more graves than he remembered.

After doubling back once, he found the spot. It was a small, simple marker, a roughly hewn oblong of concrete with a bronze plaque affixed to it.

SARA LOUISE HOPPER

BELOVED DAUGHTER

1970-1978

He crouched down, his throat suddenly filling with stone. He reached out a finger and traced the raised lettering of her name. Louise was his grandmother's name. He spoke haltingly, the syllables wriggling free of the stone.

"I...I'm sorry I stayed away so long. I messed up after you left. I hurt so many people...I think I hurt myself the most.

'I'm helping someone now. Her name is El. You'd like her. She loves puzzles, like you.

"I don't want you to think I don't miss you, because I do. I'll always miss you. You're my girl."

He sat quietly for a moment, and then chuckled quietly to himself. This was always so much more articulate and deep when TV characters did it. He touched the plaque again.

"I'm doing better, kid. Much better. El and I, we saved each other. We're going to be ok."

He fell silent again. He felt a few errant raindrops prickling the back of his hand. He tipped his chin upwards and the drops scattered across his nose and cheeks. He stood up. Tears mingled with the raindrops on his cheeks. He felt a pressing urge to go home, to see El. To hold her.

To be her dad.

He started back to his truck. The ribbon was pulling him home.